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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the views of 33 Finnish teachers and 120 of their 9th-grade students on justice at their school. Data came from structured teacher and student interviews and from students' written essays. Teachers and students identified situations in their school where they questioned the fairness of the distribution of conditions and goods affecting their lives. Results indicated that participants were interested in the concept of justice, but teachers' and students' views differed. The most common moral dilemmas teachers and students identified related to teachers' work. In matters related to teachers' work, teachers advocated the principle of need (and sometimes equity) in distributing justice. Students viewed the principles of equality and equity to be just values in distributing justice related to teachers' work. Regarding distribution of goods, students preferred the value of equality. In distributing discipline, students preferred the value of equity. Regarding student behavior, teachers preferred the value of need as the guiding value. In conflicts between home and school, teachers used the principle of equity to weigh their values. Students emphasized aspects of procedural justice and did not emphasize distributive justice regarding student behavior. Regarding minority group rights, teachers emphasized the value of equity in finding a balance between Finnish culture and student ethnicity. Students viewed the value of equality as the guiding principle in the treatment of all students. (SM)

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Teachers' and Students' Views on Distributing Justice at School

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the views of teachers and students about how justice is distributed in their school. The sample of the study consists of 33 teachers from one urban lower secondary school in Finland and their ninth-grade students (N=120). The methods used in this study were structured interview for the teachers and analysis of essays written by the students. A representative sample of students (N=20) was also interviewed to add reliability to the study. In this paper, we report the empirical findings of the views of the teachers and the students who were interviewed. The teachers and students were asked to identify situations in their school where they have questioned the fairness of the distribution of the conditions and goods that affect their lives. In the analysis of the essays and interviews, a special interest was shown in the concept of justice underlying students' and teachers' thinking. The values underlying teachers' and students' views on distribution were explored through the framework of distributive values identified by Deutsch (1985).

2 The Value Base of Distributive Justice

In solving professional moral dilemmas, teachers usually refer to some principles that guide them in the decision-making process (Tirri 1998). In the typical moral dilemmas at school, the teachers need to make a decision regarding how to distribute the conditions and goods among different students. Deutsch (1985, p. 38) has identified three different principles or values that can be used as a basis for distributing outcomes. According to him, in cooperative relations in which economic productivity is a primary goal, **equity** is typically the dominant principle of distributive justice. In cooperative relations in which the fostering or maintenance of enjoyable social relations is the common goal, **equality** will be the dominant principle in distributing justice. However, in cooperative relations in which fostering of personal development and personal welfare is the common goal, **need** will be the dominant principle of distributive justice.

In teachers' work, the primary goal is to educate the whole personality of the child regardless of his background or academic achievement. However, there are situations in which the teacher cannot distribute his/her time or goods equally to everybody. In these situations the teacher needs a value base that would guide his/her decision making. In this paper, we investigate the value base of students' and teachers' views on distributing justice in the typical everyday moral dilemmas at school.

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3 The Empirical Findings

3.1 The Values Underlying Teachers' Work

The most common moral dilemmas at school identified by teachers and students were matters related to teachers' work. Usually, these conflicts dealt with punishing or grading students and sensitive matters that students had confided to the teachers. In the dilemmas that dealt with a colleague's professional morality, the teachers always took the side of the students, by justifying their action by the principle of the best interest of a child. In these dilemmas teachers were guided by the value of need in distributing justice. The needs of students were perceived as the most important principles in teachers' decision making. In the sensitive matters, as well, teachers had used the principle of need in solving the problems. Usually these dilemmas were ones where the teachers had to question their role and competence as a teacher. A teacher who had faced this kind of dilemma reflected the case in the following way:

"First I thought that it might be better not to ask this student a question but then I felt that the student might find me ignorant if I do not ask her anything. This kind of a sensitive matter might not belong to teachers' work but you cannot ignore them if you work with the students. I wanted to show the girl that I cared. I felt that she needed caring from me."(Female, twenty years of teaching experience)

In Figure 1, it can be seen that in the matters related to teachers' work the teachers have used the principle of need in solving moral dilemmas. In four cases that dealt with punishing and grading the students, teachers have not expressed any principle in distributing justice. In all these cases, teachers were concerned with the way they treated particular students. The teachers had to reconsider if they had been too strict in their behavior toward these students. The principle of equality was not used in any of the cases related to teachers' work. However, the principle of equity was used in two of these dilemmas. Both moral dilemmas dealt with confidential matters that the students had told the teachers. The teachers were concerned with the safety of these students and found it difficult to keep these things confidential. The teachers had used the principle of equity in comparing the negative consequences of their actions to each other. The teachers had promised the students not to tell anybody what they had been told. On the other hand, teachers were afraid that the students were in danger and they wanted to prevent any danger, if possible. In both these cases, the teachers had found confidentiality more valuable than the possible danger of the students. One teacher reasoned his decision in the following way:

"I thought that trust and the agreement I had made with the student was more important. If I promise something, I have to keep my promise no matter what happens. I took quite a risk. I viewed that the risk was a smaller 'evil' in this situation." (Male, six years of teaching experience)

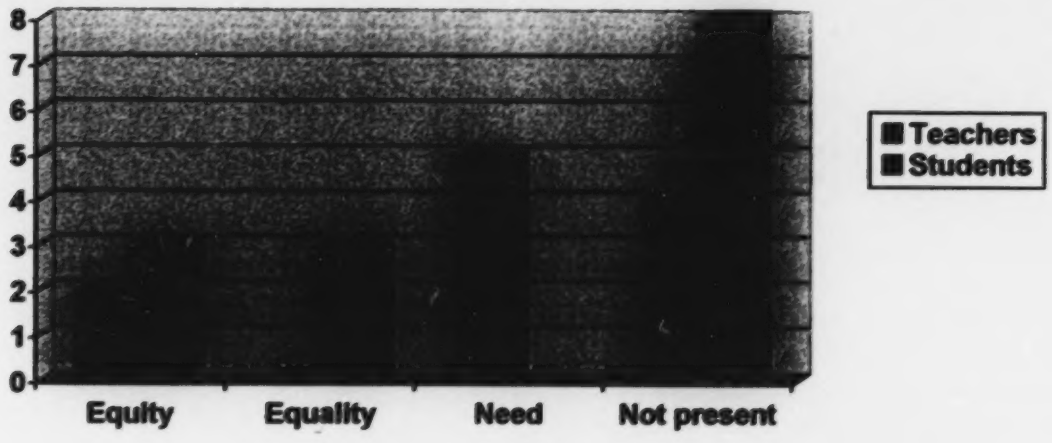

Figure 1. The values underlying teachers' work

The students reported conflicts in their school in which the teacher had been biased toward academically gifted students. All these situations had taken place in the classroom, where the teacher had seated the students according to their academic performance. The students who had identified these moral dilemmas complained about the obvious division between the good and the poor students. According to these students, the teacher had given more attention to the good students. The students' value underlying their views of distributing justice was equality. One student who complained about this issue justified her values in the following way:

"The teacher transferred some of the good students to seats in the front. The rest of the students had to sit in the back of the classroom. It would have been fair to transfer everybody and not only some of the students."

In Figure 1, the frequencies of students' use of the principle of equality compared to the other principles of justice can be seen. In the same figure, it can be observed that the students have not used the principle of need in any of the dilemmas dealing with matters related to teachers' work. In eight cases, the students have not expressed any principles of justice in their stories. Instead, they have emphasized the procedural aspects of justice (Lind & Tyler 1988). However, the students have used the principle of equity in the situations in which they think that a teacher had punished a student too strictly. Usually, the students criticize equal punishment of all students in the cases where one of the students had been more active. The following case is a good example of the situation in which the students advocate the principle of equity in punishments:

"I think the teacher treated my friend unjustly in one lesson. My friend and another student had some argument, as they always have. Then this boy took some of the food we were making and rubbed it into my friend's hair. My friend got very angry and threw some water on this boy. The teacher got involved and started to shout. Later she

gave a punishment slip to both of these students. I think it was unfair to judge my friend in the same way as the boy. They both had to stay after school. Most of the other students took the side of my friend; only the friends of the boy took his side. I think this boy should have been the only one to be punished because he was the one who started the fight. My friend had to go home to wash her hair in the middle of the day because this boy had rubbed food into it."

An interesting observation of the principles used by students is their tendency to use the principle of equality in teachers' distribution of his/her attention and goods. On the other hand, in the distribution of punishment the students advocate the principle of equity. The teachers prefer the value of need in distributing justice in the matters related to their work. However, the value of equity could also be found behind teachers' principles in distributing justice at school. This value was used in the situations in which the teachers had to weigh the consequences of two negative things. The teachers always advocate the choice that they found to be the best one for their students.

3.2 The Values Underlying Students' Behavior

In the dilemmas that dealt with students' behavior, the teachers did not use the principle of equality at all in justifying their actions. In two cases, teachers did not express any principle of distributing justice. In the cases that dealt with physical or psychological harassment, they had always used the principle of need in distributing justice. The teachers have viewed the right of the student to be safe at school as the guiding principle in solving these dilemmas. The justice had been distributed by taking the side of the weakest student. In the cases that dealt with the negative attitude of some students toward school, the teachers had used the principle of equity in their attempts to balance the values of home and school. The teachers had viewed the values of home as more important than the values of school. If the students do not want to study, the teachers cannot force them to learn. The teachers have allowed the values from home to overcome their own values. In Figure 2, the distributions based on need and equity can be seen in the dilemmas concerning students' behavior.

Most issues identified by students in the category of students' behavior dealt with physical or psychological harassment. The students emphasized procedural justice in these cases and did not express many principles of distributive justice. In Figure 2, it can be seen that the only value of distribution exhibited by students was the principle of equality. This principle was present in the story in which the student found it unjust that one of the students in her class had collected less money for a field trip than the others. The student expressed her value of equal distribution by saying: *"I think everybody should collect an equal amount of money for the group trip."* This finding supports our observation in the dilemmas related to teachers' work in which the students advocated the principle of equality in teachers' distribution of goods. The same trend can be found in matters related to students' behavior in a situation in which a student views the collection of goods to be an equal effort for everybody.

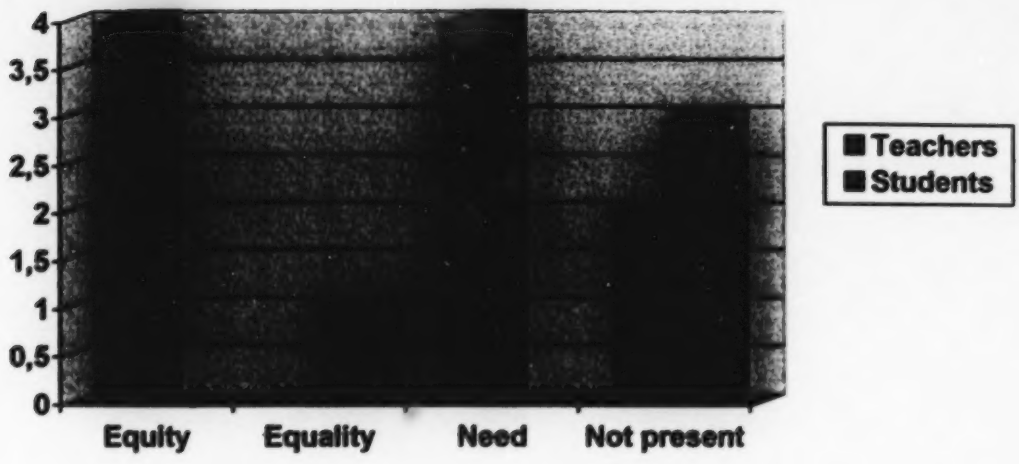

Figure 2. The values underlying students' behavior

3.3 The Values Underlying Minority Groups

In the dilemmas related to the rights of minority groups, the teachers had used the principle of equity the most (see Figure 3). This emphasis can be understood from the principles teachers had used in solving the conflicts with minority students. In these conflicts, the teachers had to make compromises in their attempts to find a balance between the child's own ethnic identity and the Finnish culture. In the moral dilemmas, teachers had to decide which emphasis was more accurate in the given situation. In a case where a teacher thought a minority student had lied, the teacher wanted to make sure she was not mistaken and she punished this student in a more lenient way than she would have punished a Finnish student. The teacher reasoned that there was a possibility that the student did not understand her instructions and viewed a too-lenient punishment to be a less serious error than an unjust punishment.

One teacher referred to the principle of need in advocating a strategy of teaching minority children to behave in a way that would help them to cope with life. One teacher did not express his/her principle of justice in matters related to minority groups. The only principle of equality can be found in the situation in which a teacher discussed the dilemma of celebrations at school. These celebrations -- for example, Christmas-- had a Christian significance, and the teacher found that to be unfair to the students from the minority groups. These children practice religions other than Christianity, but they deserve to have an equal opportunity to participate in the celebrations at school. The teacher justified his view of community and equality of opportunities in the following way:

"I think that a school should have celebrations that everybody could have an equal opportunity to participate in."(Male, four years of teaching experience)

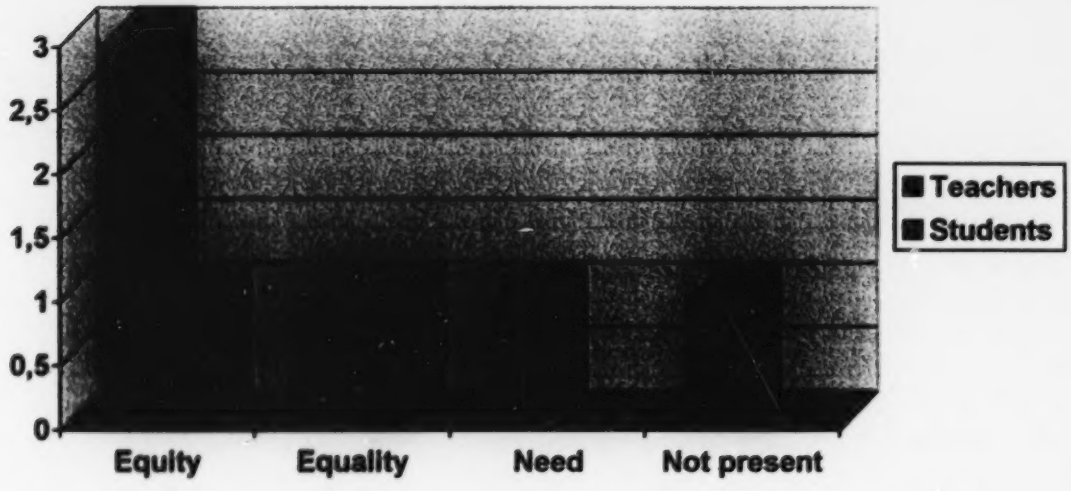

Figure 3. The values underlying minority groups

The students expressed the values of equality and equity in the matters related to the rights of the minority groups (see Figure 3). One student viewed the principle of equality to be the guiding value in solving conflicts related to minorities. He expressed his view in the following way:

"In our school the minority students receive better treatment than the others. I think that we are all equal and we should be treated equally in school."

In the conflicts between the minority students and the Finnish students, the same principle of equity could be found as in the other cases involving fighting and punishment. The student wrote about a fight at school in the following way:

"Once there was a fight between a black and a white. I was not at present when the fight started and I do not know the reasons for it. However, the Finn got a bigger punishment than the foreigner. I think this happens every time when the whites and the blacks fight with each other. I think it is wrong that even in the case where the black has started the fight the Finn is punished."

4 Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have investigated the values underlying teachers' and students' concepts of justice. A special interest was shown in the views of students and teachers on how justice should be distributed at school. The context of our study was a lower secondary school with the real-life moral dilemmas experienced by teachers and

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students. The empirical findings indicate that the views of teachers and students differ from one another. In the matters related to teachers' work, the teachers advocate the principle of need in distributing justice. The principle of equity was also used in some of the dilemmas related to teachers' work. The students viewed the principles of equality and equity to be just values in distributing justice in matters related to teachers' work. In the distribution of goods, the students preferred the value of equality as the guiding principle of distribution. However, in the distribution of punishment, the students preferred the value of equity. In the matters related to students' behavior, the teachers emphasized the value of need as the guiding value of distributive justice. In the conflicts between home and school, the teachers had used the principle of equity in weighing their values. The students emphasized aspects of procedural justice and did not express many values of distributive justice in the matters related to students' behavior. However, one principle of equality could be found in the distributive views of students in the matters related to students' behavior. In the matters related to the rights of the minority groups, the teachers emphasized the value of equity in their efforts to find the balance between the Finnish culture and the ethnic identity of the minority students. The principle of equality could also be found in the dilemmas concerning the rights of the minority groups to participate in celebrations at school. The students viewed the value of equality as the guiding principle in the treatment of all the students at school. However, in the distribution of punishment, the students should not be punished according to ethnic identity but rather to their role in a conflict. The findings of this study can be used in school to guide discussions about moral education and justice and in the efforts to build just communities in schools.

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